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774 [775] dreams. When a man dies the soul remains near the house and when a child is born we say 'A visitor has come' meaning that the soul has returned to its own place.

The ability of the soul to leave the body and its power of independent movement is illustrated by a significant story, told by a middle-aged Muria, Dalsai of Kerawahi.

> When I was about fourteen years old I died of small-pox and my soul was taken to Mahapurub. I watched my parents sitting round my body weeping in their grief. Mahapurub was sitting on a cot: my soul said to him, 'I'm hungry, give me something to eat'. Mahapurub replied, 'What do you want to eat?' My soul said, 'Ripe mangoes, ripe figs and plenty of salphi juice to drink'. Mahapurub said, 'There's nothing to eat here: go back to Manjhpur [the Middle World or earth] and have it there'. So my soul returned to its body and the corpse sat up. I said to my family, 'What are you weeping for?'
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> I then asked for ripe mangoes, ripe figs and salphi juice, and my parents gave me everything I wanted. But the Mata [goddess of small-pox feared by Hindus and aboriginals alike] said, 'You have escaped from Mahapurub, but you can't escape from me. Give me one of your eyes'. Since then I have been blind in one eye.

Kotla Muria of Kuntpadar describes how in his youth he 'died' during a cholera epidemic.

> Everyone fled from the village leaving me senseless in the house. I died and my soul went to Adibhum, the Lower World. There I saw a world just like ours, but the men were of small stature, and the cows and bullocks were the size of pigs. When I went among them, the inhabitants said, 'Who is this man? Why has he come here? We have no room for him'. They gave me some food and asked me to leave immediately. My soul returned to earth and entered my body. The food I had taken in Adibhum was enough for me to move my legs a little, and presently I recovered.

The effect of such stories on the simple aboriginal mind is to impress upon it the belief that the soul can exist apart from its bodily integument. Even when that has been shed for ever, dreams prove that the soul continues to exist, though it is only possible to see the Dead for a few years, up to the time when they are finally mingled with the Hanal. It is generally supposed that there is no need to tend or placate a man's soul more than twenty years after his death.

775 After death, the soul goes to Mahapurub and, when a sufficient time has passed, returns to the 'warmth and comfort' of its own family. Though the Muria believe in rebirth, they have no idea of Karma and their picture of life after death is quite unmoralized. There are no words in Gondi for sin or virtue: a man may be ruined, here and hereafter, for breach of a taboo, but the notion of retribution for sinners is an alien importation.

● 772 775 Have the Muria any idea of Hell or Heaven? Their myths and folk-tales are full of references to the three worlds—Porrobhum or Uparpur, the abode of Mahapurub or Ispural; Nadumbhum or Manjhpur, the Middle World, the earth on which we live; and Adibhum or Tarpur, the Under World. This typically Hindu conception has the advantage of giving the story-teller three stages or levels to work on and greatly extends the possible range of a hero's adventures. There is frequent communication between these worlds by

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means of a silken thread let down from above. The daughters of Mahapurub slide down this thread when they visit the world to dance; heroes whose brides have been carried away to the Upper World swarm boldly up it. In at least one tale a god, Bhimul Pen, goes to the Under World to dig for roots.

But as Porrobhum is not a heaven where the good are rewarded, so in genuine Muria thought Adibhum is not regarded as a place of punishment for departed sinners. It is occupied by ogres, Dano and Rakshasa; it is an arena for high adventure rather than a place of punishment. Grigson, very properly, mocks at Russell and Hiralal's statement that the Bastar Gond have 'a conception of retribution after death for the souls of evil-doers' who are 'hurled down into a dense forest without any salphi trees' implying that their 'idea of a place of punishment for departed sinners is one in which no alcoholic liquor is to be had'.[1] I do not agree, however, that this suggestion 'emanated from a few Jagdalpur Methodist converts'.[2] The idea is entirely in character; it is just the sort of thing that a Muria who had heard of hell and retribution might have evolved.

The completeness of the divorce between the fate of the dead and any kind of moral retribution is shown clearly in Muria ideas about what happens to a woman who dies in pregnancy or child-birth. The purest and sweetest girl who meets with this unhappy fate is condemned to turn into a horrible succuba until after a few years she passes to Rakasgarh, the land of ogresses, though some treacherous villain hanged in jail may be given every honour after death.

IV. The Intervention of the Departed in Human Affairs

But wherever they may be, the Departed are believed to be vitally interested in human affairs. They are naturally conservative and are particularly interested in maintaining the laws and customs of their tribe. Any breach of the taboos relating to women is specially hateful to them. Adultery is punished, according to Muria opinion, by some form of dropsy which is brought upon the offenders by the Departed, to whom elaborate offerings must be made before a cure can be effected. So also in a case of murder or grievous hurt peace can only be made between the two families if peace is made first between their ancestors. The ceremonial hunt can be ruined by the indignant dead if a woman in the absence of her husband commits adultery with another man.

The Muria like to associate the dead in all those activities which are dearest to them. At harvest time, when grain is taken to the thrashing-floor they throw a little to one side, and later collect and eat it, in honour of the dead. Before they drink they generally pour on to the ground a few drops of liquor for the earth and the ancestors. At every turn of human life, at every prayer that is offered and every ceremony that is performed, the dead are invoked. They are implored to protect the new-born child, to bless and make fertile the marriage-bed, to guarantee the children's dormitory, to save the village from wild beasts, to keep famine far away, to ensure a plentiful rainfall, to make the crops rich and punctual, to bring success in hunting or fishing, to save the honey-gatherer from the sting of bees, to guide the falcon

[1] Russell and Hiralal, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 96.
[2] Grigson, op. cit., p. 224. 'I have never been able', says Ward (1870), 'to find that the Gonds have any real theory as regards an after life, or the transubstantiation of the soul. They seem to consider that man is born to live a certain number of years on the earth and having fulfilled his time, to disappear.'—Ward, op. cit., p. 141.

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